

IABC Chicago: Strategic Planning

IABC Chicago has proudly aligned itself with IABC's vision and direction over the years. As IABC has updated and further defined its vision, purpose, and strategy, we have also adjusted accordingly, striving to live the outline provided by the international organization:

Vision: Professional communicators at the heart of every organization.

Purpose: To advance the profession, create connection and develop strategic communicators.

Philosophy: IABC pledges to: Represent the global profession. Foster a diverse community. Focus on insights and results. Honor our Code of Ethics. We will achieve this by being open, contemporary and professional.

Value Proposition: IABC is the only global association connecting me with the people and insights I need to drive business results.

Implementation:

In the board year 2019-20, we have taken some steps to better align the chapter with IABC's 17/20 strategy. Our objectives included finding ways to ensure we are relevant to members and the profession as a whole, giving our members the best return for their investment in us, and always operating with the highest level of ethics.

- The IABC Chicago board meets bi-annually to discuss challenges and opportunities and to identify a plan forward (planning document attached).
- We created a **strategic plan** that aligns with IABC's strategy (2019-20 strategy attached) and track our progress monthly. This strategic plan is driven by the four pillars of the IABC 17/20 strategy:
 - #1 aligns with Creating Connection.
 - #2 aligns with Advancing the Profession — creating awareness of communications as a strategic leadership function.
 - #3 aligns with Developing Strategic Communicators — providing opportunities for our team to learn and grow.
 - #4 aligns with Organization Excellence — we must continue to improve our structure.
- We **evaluated and revised the board roles** and responsibilities to ensure that they better enable us to meet or exceed our goals and those of the national strategy (in doing so, we also increased board participation this year, with [16 members](#)).
 - To assist with the annual board volunteer transition, we created **board role transition toolkits** (ongoing process).
 - We are **investing in board development** by sending two board members to Leadership Institute, providing discounted registration to professional development and other events, and secured free access for our board members to an ALI internal comms conference.
- We revised our social media and member communications strategy so we **meet members where they are** and how they like. For example, we learned that members want to know more about other members and about event they may have missed, so we now share "Member Spotlights" and event recaps. Both have been popular with members.

- Some changes have been small. For instance, the chapter has changed how the board meets. Previously, we met monthly, face-to-face, with dinner, for two hours. We added a conference call line to allow those in the suburbs to join, but call quality was spotty and we found that people often just skipped the board meetings altogether. Beginning with the current board year we have switched to virtual meetings, ensuring more people can participate more often. We've also made them shorter (one hour or less) and moved the starting time earlier to avoid interfering with commutes and family activities. This seems like a no-brainer, but it lets us tap into new volunteer talent that we might otherwise miss, and thus **better diversify** the board.
- We have updated our chapter bylaws. The bylaws were last refreshed five years previously but were still full of formal, archaic language that was difficult to read and understand. Frankly—even the board didn't reference them. To align with IABC's pledge to be **open, contemporary and professional**, we updated not only the language, making the document more easily readable and understandable, but also incorporated the Ethics Code and the IABC vision and purpose. These new bylaws have been approved by the board and will be presented to our membership early in 2020 for a vote.
- IABC Chicago determined we needed to listen to our members for their advice in planning our professional development programming. We routinely collected survey data about what attendees want to see, but we rarely used the data for planning. We have gone back to survey results to drive our programming in the 2019-20 year. One thing we heard was that while our programs were good and appreciated, they were heavily focused on internal communications, so we weren't doing a good job **representing the global profession**. We have since sought out subject matter experts in external communication topics, such as brand reputation, social media, consumer trust, etc., to help us round out our offerings.
- To better position the chapter to be able to continue to **provide member value** over the long-term, the board has taken a hard look at the chapter's finances. While we had a strong financial position, we also experienced a steady decrease in membership that affected our revenue streams (both member rebates and programming registrations).
 - We implemented a "break even or better" target for all programming (except two annual member celebrations) and we carefully track our progress.
 - We also did a hard scrub of our ongoing expenses to identify areas we could cut back or live without. For instance, we identified a podcasting service we have not used in years but for which we were still paying an ongoing fee.
 - We sought IABC's advice for establishing financial reserves to ensure the chapter can continue providing value for our members for the foreseeable future.
 - We report finances monthly to the full board to ensure transparency.
- As we have planned out our program year, the Professional Development committee is careful to consider the purpose from IABC's 17/20 strategy: **Advance the Profession, Create Connection, and Develop Strategic Communicators**. As we consider topics and presenters, the team applies critical thinking to be sure what we offer members and potential members truly aligns with these strategic priorities. Topics must offer professional insight, active networking opportunities or strategic skill development to area communication professionals.

Results:

Many of our results are detailed above.

- So far, event attendance has increased by 5-10% per event.
- Nonmember participation in events has also increased.
- Participant satisfaction ratings remain high (85% or above).
- We have increased the amount of promoted owned content by 30% on all channels (social, website).
- Chapter operations have been enhanced to sustain momentum (e.g. created board toolkits, invested in Zoom, reorganized all files from old IABC Google site to Google Drive).
- We have maintained our current sponsorships (two) and are seeking out additional partnership opportunities.
- While membership numbers weren't part of the goals, we have seen an increase in about 15 members since we began positively affirming alignment with IABC's 17/20 strategy.

Additionally:

- **Representing the global profession:** IABC Chicago's programming in the current year covers multiple disciplines, rather than all internal communication, better reflecting our demographics. We are looking forward to a February program that covers all disciplines: the annual Edelman Trust Barometer. Member and nonmember feedback is now a regular input for the board and influences our decision making.
- **Fostering a diverse community:** Our board now includes professionals at different career stages, in different industries, and from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We strive to present member opportunities in the same way, understanding that people are more engaged when they see other people like themselves represented in an organization. It's exciting to hear different points of view at board meetings, and hear each viewpoint being given serious consideration. That's not to suggest that prior boards did not give weight to opposing views, but when the board is mostly homogenous or contains few new members, there may not be diverse opinions or discussion to be had.
- **Focus on insights and results:** As proponents of two-way communication, it was odd that we did not previously factor survey results into our decision making. Now that we do, we feel more certain that our professional development programs are adding value for both members and nonmembers, making chapter membership more relevant.
- **Advance the Profession, Create Connection, and Develop Strategic Communicators:** As mentioned above, critically assessing opportunities and narrowing where we choose to invest our resources (money, time, energy) has gotten us out of the "must be everything for everyone" mindset and helps us focus on offering relevant resources for area communication professionals. One important result has been a shift in focus from driving membership numbers to a focus on delivering member value. This comes from a belief that providing value-added services will ultimately do more to attract and retain members than just pushing for bigger numbers.
- **Open, contemporary and professional:** The update to our bylaws has given our board a common ground for decision making. For instance, our previous bylaws called for Roberts' Rules of Order, yet we rarely used them (except when it suited someone's agenda). The new bylaws formalize our actual process, a consensus and quorum model.

The entire document is more contemporary, and members will see a more approachable board (and, we hope, want to be involved in that board).

IABC Chicago remains a work in progress. We are grateful to IABC for providing the 17/20 framework for us to reimagine our chapter a bit at a time.